



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Darby Ranger District

712 N. Main Street
Darby, MT 59829
406-821-3913

RECEIVED

OCT 09 2007

File Code: 1900 Planning
Date: October 3, 2007

Ravalli County Commissioners

Dear Interested Party:

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I am seeking public comments on the Weasel Timber Salvage and Underburning Project located on the Darby Ranger District on the Bitterroot National Forest. The project was originally proposed as a fuel reduction project that included slashing, piling and prescribed burning. The Forest mailed out letters to the public requesting comments on the project last spring. Resource analysis completed on the project indicated that there was an opportunity to salvage harvest beetle-killed timber on the same site and so this has now been added to the original proposal.

The project objectives are to 1) Restore and maintain ponderosa pine stands, 2) Reduce fuel continuity and 3) Capture the economic value of trees killed by bark beetles. The project includes salvaging beetle killed Douglas-fir on 250 acres and underburning a total of 993 acres. In preparation for underburning, noncommercial understory trees will be slashed as needed and some areas handpiled and burned. Approximately 64 acres of ponderosa pine regeneration will be thinned. Salvage harvesting would be accomplished using skyline systems. Road 62666 would be reopened to allow access into the area and no more than ½ mile of temporary road would be constructed. Snags would be left to provide wildlife habitat and future coarse woody debris.

The project is located in the Weasel Creek area in sections 25, 26, 33-36 T.5 N., R.18 W., and sections 3-5 T.4 N., R.18 W. Principal Meridian, Ravalli Co., Montana. The project is east of Skalkaho Creek within the former 1994 Bear Final Environmental Impact Statement analysis area. Treatments are located on the southerly aspects of the Weasel Creek drainage. The total project area is approximately 993 acres and has had previous harvest and fuel management activities.

My preliminary determination is that this proposal falls within two categories of actions listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude the use of these categories. It is my intention to prepare a Decision Memo (DM) and project file and for this project. The two categories listed in FSH Chapter 31.2 are: Category #6 - Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction, and Category #13 - Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.

Resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS are the presence of: a) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or



designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; b) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds; c) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; d) Inventoried roadless areas; e) Research natural areas; f) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; and g) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

Your Comments: This comment period is intended to provide those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision being made. I am interested in any specific information you believe I should consider about this proposal; particularly any extraordinary effects you think the project may have on people or the environment and reasonable mitigations you think might help limit those effects. I will use your specific comments to: 1) improve the proposed project, 2) determine whether there are extraordinary circumstances that would preclude me from categorically excluding the project from documentation in an EA or EIS and, 3) help decide whether or not to authorize the project. Please see the attachment on Important Information for People Wishing to Comment on this Project.


Review and Appeal Opportunities: This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215, as clarified in the court order dated October 19, 2005 by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California (Case No. CIVF-03-6386JKS). An appeal may be filed by any person, or any non-Federal organization or entity that has provided comment or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action by the close of the specified comment period.

I plan to complete the environmental review and make my decision this winter. Therefore, I ask you to review the proposed activities and submit any comments and information you may have to Chuck Oliver, Darby Ranger Station, 712 North Main Street, Darby, MT 59829. Comments may also be sent via email to comments-northern-bitterroot@fs.fed.us

A Legal Notice for this project will be published in the Ravalli Republic newspaper. Comments must be received 30 days after the Legal Notice is published.

If you need additional information regarding this proposal, please contact: Sue Macmeeken at (406) 363- 7151, or smacmeeken@fs.fed.us

Sincerely,


CHARLES T. OLIVER
Darby District Ranger

Important Information for People Wishing to Comment on this Project

Public comments are invited on the Weasel Salvage and Underburn Project. Chuck Oliver, the Darby District Ranger, is the Responsible official for this project.

This project is subject to the 2003, comment, and appeal regulations at 36 CFR 215.

Only those who provide comments or other expression of interest during this comment period will be accepted as appellants.

To be timely, comments for this proposed project must be postmarked or received within 30 days after the legal notice is published in the Ravalli Republic.

The project is located in the Weasel Creek area in sections 25, 26, 33-36 T.5 N., R.18 W., and sections 3-5 T.4 N., R.18 W. Principal Meridian, Ravalli Co., Montana

My preliminary determination is that this proposal falls within two categories of actions listed in the Forest Service NEPA Handbook (FSH) that are excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and there are no extraordinary circumstances that would preclude use of the category. These categories are: Category #6 —Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction and Category #13 - Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 31.2).

How to Comment and Timeframe

Comments can be written, faxed, hand delivered, or electronic.

Written comments should be mailed to: District Ranger, Darby Ranger District, 712 North Main, Darby, MT 59829.

The Darby Ranger District FAX number is (406) 821-4264.

The Darby Ranger District telephone number is (406) 821-3913.

The Darby Ranger District office is open from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday for those who want to submit hand-delivered comments.

Electronic comments may be sent to comments-northern-bitterroot-darby@fs.fed.us

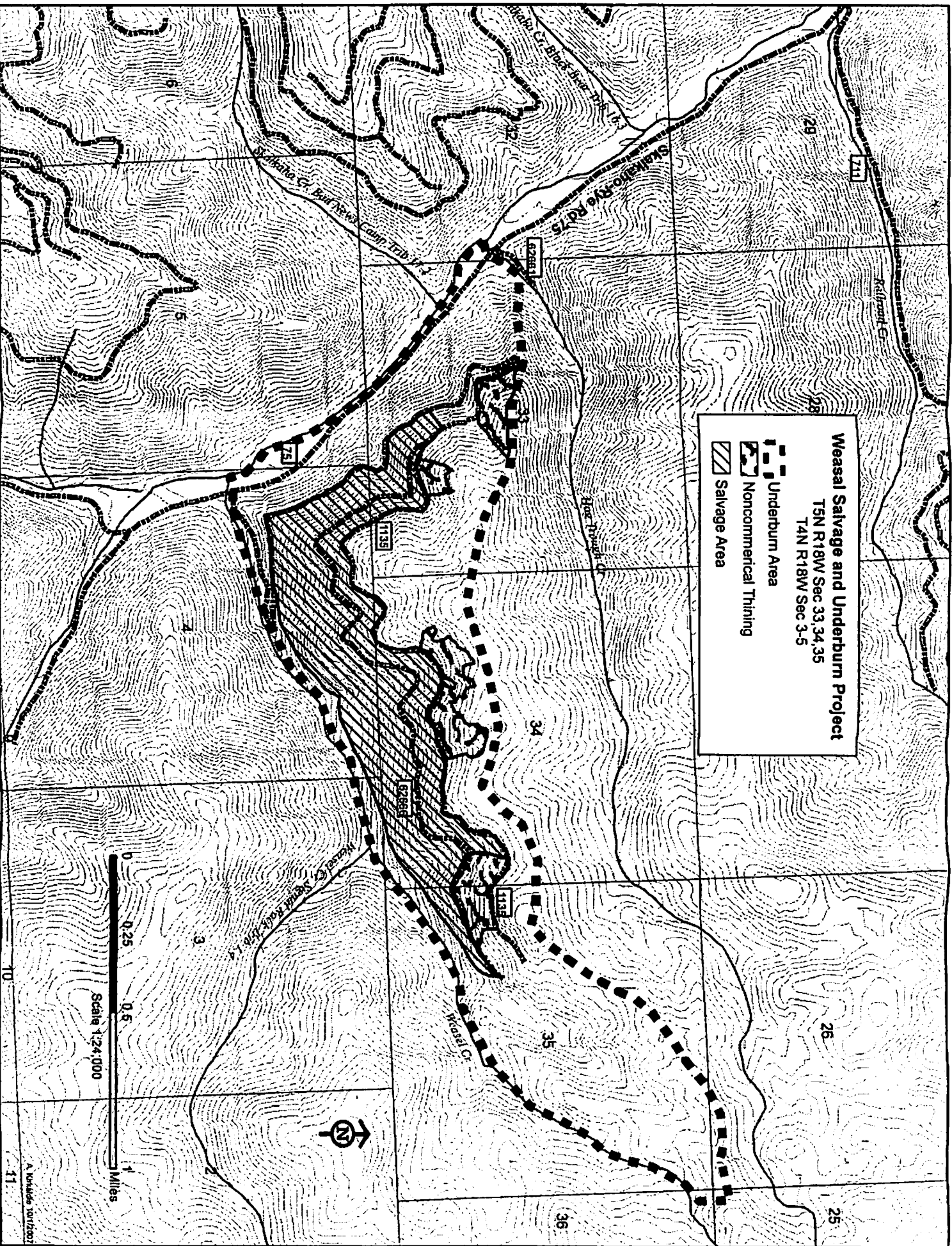
Acceptable electronic formats are ASCII text, HTML, MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt of any form of comment. For electronically mailed comments, the sender may receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation or receipt.

Comments should include: 1) name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) title of project on which the comments are being submitted; and 3) substantive comments including specific facts and supporting information for the District Ranger to consider. The names and addresses of people submitting comments will be included as part of the public record.

Each individual or a representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or be prepared to verify their identity upon request.

If you would like more information on this project, please contact: Sue Macmeeken at (406) 363-7151, smacmeeken@fs.fed.us



Weasel Salvage and Underburn Project
T5N R18W Sec 33, 34, 35
T4N R18W Sec 3-5

- Underburn Area
- Noncommercial Thinning
- Salvage Area

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles
Scale 1:24,000

